

vicinity and areas closer to the inlets. With the exception of black drum and sheepshead, gizzard shad and catfish contributed to the bycatch of this fishery in the Albemarle Sound area (Monaghan 1992), unlike southeastern Pamlico and Core Sounds where the bycatch was predominantly harvestfish, butterflyfish, and Atlantic spadefish.

Blue crabs are ubiquitous in pound net catches, but landings are largely dependent on market demand. Blue crabs may be released by escape panels, as the relative abundance of blue crabs was highest in samples collected in the northernmost areas where escape panels are not required. Blue crabs were the fifth most abundant species in Albemarle Sound catches by weight (Tables 13.53, 13.54, 13.55, and 13.56). For at-sea samples, blue crabs represented 12% of the weight of the central Albemarle Sound catches (Table 13.57).

Non-Marketable Bycatch

Non-marketable bycatch caught in flounder pound nets is rarely observed because it is typically released at sea. Such species include various species of stingray (cownose, bullnose, southern, and Atlantic stingrays), stargazers, horseshoe crabs, or regulatory discards released due to closed seasons, size restrictions or during times when there are number or poundage restrictions (striped bass, red drum, cobia), or illegal commercial take (tarpon). Other bycatch includes protected species including sturgeon and sea turtles. In the northernmost areas, many more striped bass are caught than landings and samples indicate because they are released alive due to commercial harvest restrictions. While conducting escape panel research, the nets were often so full of striped bass that fishermen were frequently required to bail striped bass out of their pound before sampling could begin. Therefore, it should be noted that if it were not for the current harvest restrictions on striped bass, this species would make up a much larger component of the pound net fishery in the Albemarle and Croatan Sounds. Although a much smaller component than striped bass, landings of red drum are also an underestimate, as the commercial harvest was restricted to limit catches to 100 pounds per trip (3M .0501) and more recent restrictions limit catches to seven fish 18-27 inches total length (TL) a day (Proclamation FF-47-2001). Other species incidentally caught by this fishery but not evident in landings due to harvest restrictions include: cobia, with commercial harvest restricted to two fish 33 inches fork length (FL) (3M .0516); tarpon, which cannot be sold commercially (3M .0509); and sturgeon, which are unlawful to possess in North Carolina (3M .0508).

Non-marketable bycatch, which is brought to shore, is typically bought and sold as “bait” or discarded. Bait comprised only 1% of the biological samples collected from 1990-2003. Species composition of the few bait catches sampled was primarily harvestfish, butterflyfish, or spadefish too small to market, Atlantic menhaden, and southern flounder which may have been mutilated (“busted gut”, eaten by crabs, etc) in some way such that they were unmarketable (Table 13.58). Other species sampled in the bait that were too small to market included spot, pinfish, Atlantic croaker, jack crevalle, and southern kingfish. Species that are not marketed as edible finfish but often discarded at the dock